Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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POEA warns job seekers vs. NMI, 4 countries

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) has issued a string of advisories to applicants, warning them to be cautious about applying for jobs in Norway, Canada, Northern Marianas, South Korea and China.

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Kris & James show

The irony was that, on the 21st anniversary of the 1986 People Power Revolution, the attention of the public was not on the lackluster celebration at the Edsa Shrine. Rather, all eyes and ears were focused on what was deemed a much bigger event.

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Economy too strong for stock rout—Arroyo

Philippine economic growth has become too strong to be threatened by the one-day worldwide stock market rout, President Gloria Arroyo said on Thursday.

"World markets may go up and down but the Philippine economy can no longer be pulled back," Arroyo said in reaction to the sharpest decline in global stocks in years, sparked by heavy losses in Shanghai.

The president said the country's improved fiscal position and the heavy remittances of eight million Filipinos working abroad continued to bolster the economy despite a 7.92 percent slump in Philippine share prices on Wednesday.

"Confidence in the Philippines and the region is unsullied. Sustained growth will carry the day," she said, just after the Philippine stock market showed signs of a

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AP

A Filipino trader talks on the phone during morning trading at the Philippine Stock Exchange in the financial district of Makati on Wednesday.

AP

NEW DELL CENTER

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, center, stands beside Richard Hunter, Dell's vice president for customer experience, right, and Peter Favila, Philippine Trade and Industry secretary during ceremonies in Quezon City on Thursday March 1, 2007. American computer maker Dell Inc. opened its second customer call center in the Philippines bringing the number of local employees to 2,600, a company official said.

POLO, OWWA all set for free health screening tomorrow

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

The Philippine Consulate General's Philippine Overseas Labor Office and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in the CNMI are now all set for tomorrow's free health screening.

The health screening will start from 8am and will end at 12pm at POLO located at Marianas Business Plaza formerly known as Nauru Building.

POLO Page 2

20 % more Filipino DHs hired in HK this January—DoLE

By VERONICA UY
INQUIRER.NET

Labor Secretary Arturo Brion on Thursday announced that 20 percent more Filipino domestic helpers (DHs) were hired in Hong Kong in January compared to December last year.

Brion's disclosure was made on the same day the new Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) policy on Filipino DHs went into full implementation,

The labor chief, who has come under fire for the new POEA guidelines, said new contracts for employment of DHs—or household service workers (HSWs) as the labor department prefers to call them—increased from 2,246 in December 2006 to 2,700 in January 2007.

He said that even on a year-on-year comparison—citing the report of the Philippine Overseas Labor Office in Hong Kong, which verifies the work contracts of DHs—the January 2007 figure was still higher by 22 percent than the 2,198 contracts for newly hired domestics in January 2006.

The new set of POEA rules, among others, raises the minimum salary of overseas Filipino HSWs from $200 monthly to $400 monthly, raises the age of eligibility from 21 years old to 23 years old, requires applicants to undergo assessment and skills training, and does away with the placement fee.

In a related development, a handful of protesters from militant groups and recruitment

20% Page 2

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PINOYNEWS

POEA names NMI, 4 countries job seekers should be cautious

By JEROME ANING
INQUIRER

As it begins its task as the government's new lead agency in the drive against illegal recruitment, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) has issued a string of advisories to applicants, warning them to be cautious about applying for jobs in Norway, Canada, Northern Marianas, South Korea and China.

POEA Administrator Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz told prospective and current overseas Filipino workers that there were no jobs for nurses in Norway and factory workers in South Korea, and that several agencies were illegally recruiting for care-giving and teaching jobs in Canada and China.

Baldoz said POEA had rejected the accreditation of Professional Management AS, a recruitment agency based in the Norwegian capital Oslo, and its Manila-based partner to recruit Filipino nurses for Norway.

According to her, the Philippine Embassy in Sweden, which has jurisdiction over Norway, inquired with the Norway Registration Authority which said it was not aware of any demand for nurses, whether foreign or local, in that country.

Baldoz also warned OFWs in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, United Arab Emirates and South Korea against applying for care giving jobs in Canada without having to return to the Philippines first.

According to Baldoz, the Canadian Career Caregiving Services, the agency offering this service, is not accredited with the POEA or any local recruiter.

"Recruitment activities done outside our territorial jurisdiction are not covered by Philippine laws on recruitment so I advise applicants to be careful in dealing with these foreign placement agencies," she said.

The POEA chief stressed the importance of securing jobs abroad through legal and documented means as she cited the sad experience of a 23-year-old education graduate who paid an illegal recruiter P200,000 to facilitate his employment as an English teacher in Beijing, China.

The victim got to China with only a six-month business visa but later found out there was no job waiting for him. He finally found one in a secondary school in Inner Mongolia, which earned him about US$600 a month, but the authorities raided the school because it did not have a license to hire foreign teachers.

The Filipino was jailed and fined because it turned out that his visa was fake. Through the Philippine Embassy's intercession, his jail term was reduced but he was deported back to the Philippines, with nothing to pay his debts incurred in his "speedy" employment.

POEA also called on other victims of alleged illegal recruitment by Rowena Agarao, wife of a Filipino factory worker in South Korea, to come forward and file their complaints.

Thirty people complained to POEA that they paid Agarao huge placement fees for the speedy processing of their work papers.

Baldoz said Filipino workers may only secure jobs in Korea through the Employment Permit System that only POEA is authorized to implement in the Philippines.

Baldoz added that Korea had abolished its Alien Industrial Trainee System and had stopped issuing trainee visas. She urged Filipino trainees in Korea to return home upon the expiration of their contracts and re-apply under the EPS. Otherwise, they would be treated as illegal workers, Baldoz warned.

Meanwhile, the Department of Labor and Employment, POEA's mother agency, warned job seekers about the ongoing crackdown on overstaying foreigners in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, a United States territory in the Western Pacific.

The Philippine Overseas Labor Office in the territory's capital Saipan reported that the CNMI labor department recently published a list of non-resident workers who had been illegally staying and who would be deported from the territory.

The list consisted of names of foreign workers whose contracts had expired and those who had failed to find jobs within the 45-day transfer period and yet continued to remain in the CNMI.

The list also contained a public notice warning employers to refrain from hiring the 1,000 listed individuals who included Filipinos.

Filipinos with dual citizenships can give to bets—Comelec

By VERONICA UY
INQUIRER.NET

Filipinos with dual citizenships in the United States and elsewhere in the world are free to contribute to the campaign kitty of candidates in the Philippines, an official of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) said.

Citing the Omnibus Election Code (Batas Pambansa 881) and the Fair Elections Act (Republic Act 9006), Elections Commissioner Rene Sarmiento said the prohibition against campaign contributions covered only foreigners, including Filipinos who have become naturalized Americans.

"Foreigners, purely foreigners, di pwede [not allowed]. So Filipino-Americans pwede [allowed] if they hold dual citizenships. Green-card holders who are still Filipino citizens pwede [are allowed]. Of course OFWs [overseas Filipino workers] can contribute," he said.

Sarmiento said the two election laws did not set any limits in terms of either the amount of money that could be given candidates or the candidates to whom the money might be given.

Existing laws, Sarmiento said don't require political supporters to report their contributions. The reporting requirement is imposed on the candidate and his/her political party.

Sarmiento said Comelec Resolution 7767 required treasurers of candidates and political parties to submit their principals' statements of expenses and contributions within 30 days after elections. "Hindi trabaho ng supporter yun [That's not the job of the supporter]," he said.

The former human rights commissioner said candidates and political parties that would violate this rule faced the following penalties:

- They could not assume the post if they would win;
- They faced disqualification; and
- They might be fined from P1,000 to P30,000 for the first offense and P2,000 to P60,000 for the second offense. The exact amount will be at Comelec's discretion.

On the other hand, Sarmiento said that foreigners found contributing money to Filipino candidates would be charged criminally and deported if they were in the Philippines. "The prescription period is three years. That means cases may be filed three years of the offense," he said.

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recovery with a 4.0 percent rebound earlier Thursday.

Francis Estrada, president of the Asian Institue of Management, a major regional business school, agreed that the effect of the stock market fall would be limited, saying "there are no underlying fundamentals," for a wider downturn.

"Nobody seems to look at this as a form of contagion," he said.

The market rebounded Thursday closing 4.0 percent higher at 3,190.12 as investors took comfort in Wall Street's recovery, dealers said. ***(Agence France-Presse)***

20%
FROM PAGE 1

agencies staged a rally in front of the labor department's offices to air their objection to the new rules.

Migrante spokesman Gary Martinez, who had been a factory worker in South Korea for 12 years, said they opposed the training requirement as it would only be an additional source of corruption and one more burden for departing HSWs.

He said higher salaries may also drive employers to hire HSWs from other countries who are willing to receive lower wages.

But Brion tried to allay these fears, pointing to the figures of Hong Kong. He said employers in Hong Kong do not seem discouraged from hiring Filipino HSWs.

"This is an indication that the policy reforms being instituted to provide the Filipino HSWs a cover of protection from potential abuse and exploitation abroad are not adversely affecting the preference of Hong Kong employers for overseas Filipino workers [OFWs]," Brion said.

The labor chief added that the continued preference for Filipino HSWs in Hong Kong proves the institution of the policy reforms is not only morally correct but also an illustration of the wisdom of sending only those HSWs with adequate skills and knowledge in household work.

"Despite the salary increase, many Hong Kong employers still preferred OFWs for their skills, dependability, and ability to communicate and adjust effectively in foreign environments," Brion said.

On the protesters' opposition to lengthy skills training and language competency tests, the labor chief reiterated that HSWs who have already gained experience in household work, especially abroad, need not undergo training but only the skills assessment to certify their competence. He said that only those who fail the assessment three times are required to train.

Brion also said HSWs may take free language courses at the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration if they are to be deployed to a country different from their previous employment.

POLO
FROM PAGE 1

OWWA welfare officer Leonor Mabagal said her office has prepared all the supplies needed for the health screening.

The free health screening is for overseas Filipino workers. Services during the free health consultation include blood pressure, blood sugar level, and eye check up—courtesy of Hardt Eye Clinic.

In December 2006, the Philippine Consulate exceeded its target of participants—the first time it happened since the Consulate began the program.

Mabagal said that over 400 overseas Filipino workers had availed themselves of the free health screening.

Mabagal earlier said her office is anticipating that tomorrow's screening would attract a little more than the usual turnout.

She said ,her team prepared materials and medicines to accommodate a little over 300 people.

She said participants who would want to have their blood sugar level checked need to refrain from eating and drinking fluids from midnight of March 3 until the check up time.

The activity tomorrow is in collaboration with the OWWA-OFW Support Group and volunteer medical team in the CNMI.

POLO warns OFWs vs text scams

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

DEKADA MOVEMENT
Members of Dekada organization pose for a group photo as they wait for the arrival of U.S. congressional staffers former Insular Affairs Director Allen Stayman and Josh Johnson at the Francisco C. Ada Saipan International Airport on Saturday.

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

Just when Filipinos overseas thought that short text messages scam has died down, the Philippine Overseas Labor Office recently received an advisory from the Philippine government of latest incidents.

Labor attaché Joan Lourdes Lavilla said she received a memo from the headquarters in Manila to disseminate and warn all the OFWs in the CNMI about a possible infiltration of the text scam to the Filipino community.

The latest victims, she said, involved those in Milan, Italy, Hawaii, and Hong Kong.

The scam also implicates the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas or the Central Bank of the Philippines.

BSP in the past released a public warning in leading newspapers in the Philippines advising the public to "disregard and not believe text messages informing the receiver that he won in a raffle allegedly sponsored by the BSP."

The winnings of the alleged raffle ranges from one to two million pesos cash.

To be able to claim the prize, texters advise the would-be victims to first deposit money in a bank account supposedly to cover tax payments.

Lavilla said the incident in Milan involved a victim who was told that he won in the December 2006 Pamaskong Handog promo for OFWs.

The victim was informed that he had won two million pesos in cash.

"The Filipino community should heed this warning and refrain from sending money [to the scammers]," she said.

Angara, Sotto to file complaint at Comelec vs 'Dog jingle'

By ERWIN OLIVA
INQUIRER.NET

MANILA—Senator Edgardo Angara and former senator Vicente Sotto III will be filing a complaint before the Commission on Elections (Comelec) against a controversial jingle being played by the opposition, their lawyer said Friday.

But Romulo Macalintal clarified that the complaint was not meant to stop the airing of the song, entitled "ASO" (DOG) but rather for the Comelec to determine whether it violated certain provisions in the Fair Elections Act and its implementing guidelines.

Angara and Sotto, supporters of former president Joseph Estrada and who had campaigned for the late actor Fernando Poe Jr. when he ran for president in 2004, are now senatorial candidates of the administration's TEAM Unity after a falling out with some members of the opposition, which Estrada still heads.

"What we're trying to say is that they should comply with the election law. ASO is not a lawful propaganda," said Macalintal, referring to the jingle that criticizes turncoats and likens them to dogs.

Reports said actor Rez Cortez, a staunch supporter of Poe, had admitted to producing the jingle.

Macalintal said that any political advertisement should disclose who would benefit from it, who paid for it, and the address of the individual or group that paid for it.

"It's up to Comelec to go after them," said Macalintal.

Health risks at call centers probed

By VINCENT CABREZA
INQUIRER

BAGUIO CITY—Researchers of a Baguio hospital have started looking into medical problems that appear to be common among employees of call centers and other business process outsourcing (BPO) facilities operating at the Baguio City Economic Zone.

Dr. Leopoldo Calimlim, chief of an industrial medicine facility at the Notre Dame Hospital, said doctors have been treating 10 to 14 call center employees at the zone every day for various medical complaints.

This has compelled Danilo Reyes, president of the Business Process Association of the Philippines (BPAP), to commission a comprehensive medical investigation, Calimlim said.

Reyes is also the country manager of the call center giant Client Logic Philippines, which merged in January with Sitel Philippines to form the new Sitel Corp.

At a Wednesday press conference that was organized to announce the merger, Reyes said these medical studies were essential because they would help the country's business process outsourcing industry get information about potential health hazards at BPO work places.

"Without our people, there are no companies," he told reporters.

Calimlim said existing medical reports had been confined to the effects of sleep deprivation on industrial workers.

Several studies documented the illnesses affecting workers at Silicon Valley in the United States. These led local doctors to examine call center employees for gastroenteritis, insomnia, and peptic ulcers, which are prevalent among workers abroad, Calimlim said.

But studies dealing with Filipino call centers are few, much less with workers assigned to work on different time zones, he said.

Most centers assign workers to the night shift when most of the work traffic occurs. This is because most call centers have American clients. The US time zone is 12 hours behind Philippine time, so most workers end up working on that shift.

Calimlim said Baguio doctors had been dealing with employees who suffered from weakened immune systems, which often led to serious ailments.

Lack of sleep

Doctors need to find out if the weakened immunity is caused by sleep deprivation, diet, or the conditions of the BPO facilities, he said.

He said the probe was inspired by former employees of a leading semiconductor firm at the Baguio City Economic Zone who blamed their work conditions for their illnesses, including cancer.

But researchers could not find any conclusive evidence linking the workers suffering from terminal illnesses to the firm's equipment, Calimlim said.

BCEZ officials said they conducted an independent survey of work conditions inside these facilities and discovered workers who suffered from back pains and muscle ailments.

"Many of these conditions are caused by heavy lifting and duties that require physical movement, but most of the [factories here] have corrected this," an official said.

IT 'brain drain' poses minimal threat to RP—tech group

By ALEXANDER VILLAFANIA
INQUIRER.NET

MANILA—While the flight of senior IT officials from the Philippines to other countries is becoming a common scene, this problem is only seen as a minimal problem the country faces, according to an official of the Cebu Educational Development Foundation for Information Technology (CEDFIT).

The Cebu-based group's Senior Adviser, Fred Kintanar, said in a statement that the country's overall turnover rate in the IT industry is just 10 percent and is even lower than in other employment levels, including nursing.

Kintanar said that unlike the nursing profession, which most Filipinos see as an opportunity to work and live abroad, IT professionals work overseas to hone their skills and would still want to return to the Philippines.

"There are people who have conditioned their minds to work abroad thereby taking courses that will lead them there. IT graduates study IT not mainly because they aim to work overseas but because it's their field of expertise. Some go abroad but will eventually come back," Kintanar said.

CEDFIT recently met with several IT companies in Cebu City to discuss the problem of brain drain and its effects on IT locators.

During the said meeting, several IT companies, such as iComm International, NEC Telecoms Software, InfoWeapons, iCatch IT, among others, made their concerns felt that many high-level IT personnel were leaving while they are still struggling to keep entry-level employees in the country.

Kintanar's claims were backed by the IT firm Advanced World Systems Incorporated, whose research and development manager Jonathan Tse said that while the exodus of Filipino workers for better paying jobs overseas is a problem for many industry sectors, its effect on IT companies is "generally minimal."

LABOR FRONT

Expedited hearings, pre-hearing conferences

By FERDIE P. DE LA TORRE
REPORTER

Q: Can the Department of Labor conduct expedited proceedings on a labor case filed by an alien worker who has a pending deportation case?

A. Yes. The Division of Immigration can request and the Labor's Administrative Hearing Office, in its discretion, may order that any pending labor matter involving a party who is currently in deportation proceedings in Superior Court be heard and decided on an expedited basis. However, According to the Alien Labor Rules and Regulations, the Labor Division shall not refer any individual to the Division of Immigration if that individual has a pending labor matter before the Labor Administrative Hearing Office or a pending labor matter addressed by the Administrative Hearing Office that has been appealed to the Labor Secretary or the courts.

■ ■ ■

Q: How can a labor case complainant who gets unfavorable ruling from the Labor Administrative Hearing Office maintain the status quo while his or her appeal is pending?

A: A complainant in his or her notice of appeal, either from an order of the administrative hearing officer or from the Labor Secretary's order, may apply for a stay of the order or for an injunction requesting to maintain the status quo pending his or her appeal.

The complainant, in his or her request, must file a sworn affidavit that states how he or she will suffer immediate and irreparable injury, loss, or damage if the request is not granted; why he or she is likely to succeed on the merits of their appeal; and why the balance of equities favors granting a stay or injunction.

■ ■ ■

Q: What can you expect at pre-hearing conferences before the Labor Administrative Hearing Office?

A: An Administrative Hearing Officer may direct the parties and or their counsel, prior to the course of the Labor case hearing, when the officer finds that the proceeding would be expedited by such a conference. At that conference, the hearing officer may discuss any topic that may facilitate the resolution of the case, including settlement at such a conference.

Submit questions on labor issues to Saipan Tribune *via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the* Saipan Tribune*'s office on the second floor of the CIC Centre on Beach Road, Garapan.*

Melo Commission to have final report after May polls—Palace

By MICHAEL LIM UBAC
INQUIRER

The lifespan of the Malacañang-created Melo Commission, which is tasked to look into the extrajudicial killings in the country, will end in June.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has extended the tenure of the fact-finding body after it produced a partial but controversial report in January.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said on Thursday Arroyo was expecting the body to come up with a definitive conclusion on the extrajudicial killings after the May elections.

He said the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) would take over after that.

According to Ermita, the President wants the CHR to play a pivotal role in the resolution of more than 800 killings of mostly leftwing activists since 2001 in keeping with the commission's recommendations.

The military insisted that most of the killings had been carried out by communist rebels themselves to purge the underground movement of spies and infiltrators.

Part of the recommendations of the Melo Report is the creation of a "civilian investigative agency" which will be independent of, and not under the command, control, or influence of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

"To ensure that all reports and complaints of extrajudicial killings against the military are investigated promptly, impartially, and effectively, the investigation must be conducted by a body or agency independent from the armed forces," said the report.

It said the independent body must have the following tasks and powers: control of its budget, staffed by civilian agents well-trained in law enforcement and investigative work, and equipped with the necessary array of technical devices to enhance their investigative capabilities.

The body must be authorized to execute warrants and arrests and provided with adequate forensic laboratory and other technical devices, the commission said.

It pointed out that a single investigating body would be enough since "our Armed Forces is not so big as to require separate agencies for its services."

The commission, which blamed the military for some of the killings due to "circumstantial evidence," recommended to President Arroyo to ask Congress to create such an independent investigating body.

But since Congress is on a four-month election break, Ermita said the government would start with CHR, beefing up its capability, including forensic investigation, using the P25 million initial budget released by the Palace last week.

President Arroyo had already ordered the AFP and the Department of Justice to work with the CHR "so that very specific cases can be examined."

Arroyo also said she had proposed to the Supreme Court to create specials courts which would solely handle the political killings and for the justice department to designate special investigators and prosecutors.

The President said in a statement on Monday that she had "made it a top priority to resolve the killings of political and agrarian activists and of members of the media and to prevent further killings."

"I am confident that we are on the right course," she said.

President of the Security Council Lauro L. Baja, Jr. in the UN Security Council.

RP to campaign for UN post vacated by recalled Baja

By VERONICA UY
INQUIRER.NET

Amb. Baja at a UN gathering.

The country will campaign for the vice presidency of the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (Ecosoc) which became vacant after Ambassador Lauro Baja, who was elected to the post in his personal capacity, was recalled to the home office.

"The post is vacant now. And any representative of the Philippines can make a bid for the unexpired term of Ambassador Baja," foreign affairs spokesman Claro Cristobal told reporters Wednesday..

Cristobal clarified that the post, which was purportedly relinquished by Baja in favor of Japan, remains vacant until the Ecosoc votes for Baja's replacement.

"Ecosoc will respect the Asian group's recommendation but the group, to which the Philippines belongs, has yet to recommend who to replace [Baja in] the vacant post," he said.

Cristobal said retired Chief Justice Hilario Davide, who replaced Baja as Permanent Representative to the UN, is now in New York and meeting with his counterparts from around the world.

The Ecosoc is one of the UN's seven bureaus. The other are Secretary General, General Assembly, Security Council, General Trusteeship, and International Court of Justice.

RP to bring 39 jailed Filipinos home from Brunei

By TETCH TORRES
INQUIRER.NET

The Philippine government is working to repatriate 39 illegally recruited Filipino workers languishing in Brunei jails, an official said Wednesday.

National Bureau of Investigation Director Nestor Mantaring said the NBI was coordinating with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration to send home the Filipinos.

He said the 39, who have no working visas, failed to get a job as promised by the Manila-based MJCL International Placement Agency, which sent them to the oil-rich Brunei Darussalam.

Initial investigation by the NBI showed that instead of departing from the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, the Filipino workers were taken to Clark Air Base. From there, they were flown to Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia and took a ferryboat to Brunei.

The Brunei government imposed a penalty of P3.5 million for the 39.

Pacquiao shuts up about politics for now

Manny Pacquiao, center, with Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, right, and his wife, left.

By TARRA QUISMUNDO
INQUIRER.NET

His lips were sealed about politics, but Filipino boxing hero Manny Pacquiao had optimistic words about his upcoming bout against another Mexican boxer set less than a month before the May elections.

In a chance interview at the airport on Thursday, Pacquiao, who had expressed his intent to seek a seat in Congress for Southern Cotabato, reassured his fans that his mind was focused on nowhere but winning his fight against Mexico's Jorge Solis, set to take place at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas on April 21.

Just last November, Pacquiao knocked down Mexico's Erik Morales early in their 12-round fight in Las Vegas, Nevada.

"Of course, we will still win... They (fans) should not worry because right now, I am training diligently," said Pacquiao in a brief interview minutes before his convoy rolled out of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Centennial Terminal at noon Thursday.

"Let's not talk about politics yet. There's time to talk about that. Let's just talk about boxing," said Pacquiao in Filipino, recapping what he had said about reports that he had given up his political ambition.

Reporters caught up with the barong-clad Pacquiao shortly after his flight from General Santos City landed at the NAIA Terminal 2 at 11:55 a.m. on Thursday. But he did not elaborate when asked if he had any formal engagement on Thursday.

Sports analysts and fans have been vocal about their opposition to Pacquiao's political plans. The boxer is set to leave for the United States soon to continue training for the scheduled fight.

PINOYSTYLE

ONLY IN HOLLYWOOD

RP film pitted against Oscar winner

By RUBEN V. NEPALES
INQUIRER

LOS ANGELES—Just how important an honor was it for Auraeus Solito to be nominated in the Best Foreign Film category (the award is given to the director) at the Film Independent's Spirit Awards held last weekend?

The Filipino filmmaker, cited for his first feature, "Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros," was up against Germany's Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, who won the award. The following day, Florian, vying for the same film, "The Lives of Others," triumphed again at the Oscars.

Auraeus was in great company. His fellow nominees were: Rachid Bouchareb (France/Morocco/Algeria/Belgium)–"Days of Glory" won the François Chalais Award, and its male ensemble cast, the Best Actor Award at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival; Conerliu Prumboiu (Romania)–"12:08 East of Bucharest" bagged the Camera d'Or prize, also in Cannes last year; and Israel Adrian Caetano (Argentina)–nominated for Cannes' top prize, Golden Palm, also in Cannes 2006.

This latest feat of the Pinoy filmmaker was a big deal. Auraeus and his little film, written by Michiko Yamamoto and produced by Raymond Lee, has racked so many achievements that we may have become blasé to this recent honor. Let's not forget, too, that "Maxi," distributed in the US by Unitel Pictures, was the first Filipino film nominated at this awards event honoring the best indie films.

In the media tip sheet provided by Film Independent, the guests, nominees and special award recipients were listed alphabetically. After award-winning writer-director Steven Soderbergh's name came "Auraeus Solito." How cool was that for us to see? So, to Auraeus: Bravo and mabuhay!

The fun part

That said, we can now go to the fun stuff. Auraeus probably had the distinction of being the only guest who did a wardrobe change for the after-party. Bongga! But we're getting ahead of the story.

Let's start with the Spirit Awards' unique location—right on the beach in Santa Monica.

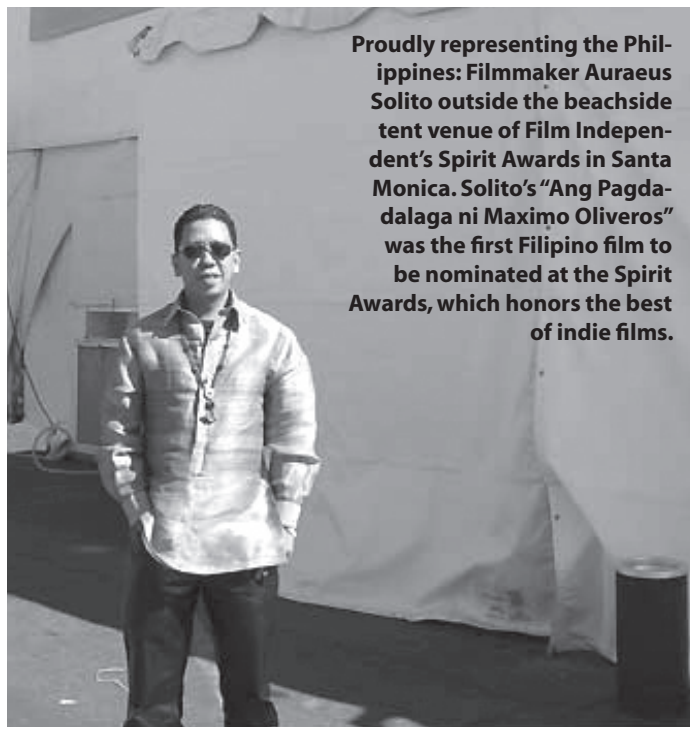
On its 22nd year, the Awards, traditionally held on the eve of the Oscars, has become big. Trophies are served inside a tent just steps away from the sand but this is a huge white one. And there are rows of white-cloth covered tables elegantly set for lunch.

Outside is a cluster of smaller tents housing: the gift lounge where the likes of Sharon Stone, Minnie Driver, Rosario Dawson and Lucy Liu hoarded Ugg Boots, Palm Treo and many more; the Elle magazine green suite; separate booths for press and photogs; and a "cantina" serving lunch and drinks. And several Port-a-Potties—as we wrote last year, these are fancy ones complete with mirrors and carpets.

Pinoy hospitality

When we saw Auraeus and his guest and LA host, Fil-Am realtor Peter (Dante) Tantiado, he was done with the lunch of steak and salmon, washed down with wine. Lighting a Capri cigarette outside the main tent, he exclaimed, "Sarap!" He wore a gold barong by his favorite, John Abul, and his usual T'boli necklace and a crucifix necklace from his boyfriend, Hai Balbuena. Streaks of brown jazzed up his hair, thanks to a Fil-Am hair stylist who did it the previous evening.

He had gone through the red (blue, actually) carpet with Fil-Am publicist Winston Emano, who offered to walk him through the phalanx of media for free. So Auraeus told me that more than anything, he was touched by the Filipino community's support for him. Lem Balagot, a caterer and owner of LA Rose Café, even loaned him a cell phone for use during his stay.



Proudly representing the Philippines: Filmmaker Auraeus Solito outside the beachside tent venue of Film Independent's Spirit Awards in Santa Monica. Solito's "Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros" was the first Filipino film to be nominated at the Spirit Awards, which honors the best of indie films.

Auraeus excitedly shared that Ryan Fleck, a Best Director nominee whose "Half Nelson" was in the running for Best Picture, told him, "I voted for you!"

As the countdown to the show began, Auraeus admitted to us, "I have no expectations. This is a fitting ending to a wonderful year."

Sunset glow

After the show, as we looked for Auraeus and Peter, we met Richard "Rich" Wong and Fil-Am actress L.A. Renigen. Richard was nominated for the IFC/Acura Someone to Award for "Colma: The Musical," which stars L.A. and was written and scored by Fil-Am H.P. Mendoza. We can't wait to see their movie, which will be shown in key US cities this summer because we have been hearing and reading a lot of good buzz about it.

All the stars had filed out and started to drive away or walk to the nearby Shutters on the Beach Hotel for the after-party and still there was no sign of Auraeus. After a quick call to the Palawano, we learned that he and Peter went home to the latter's Venice beach home to change clothes.

Finally, as a beautiful sunset glowed on the Pacific Ocean, Auraeus and Peter arrived at the party. The filmmaker changed into a black shirt with glitter, also by John Abul.

Auraeus told us some details of his next movie, a sort of reminiscing about his Philippine Science High School student days. Someday, we hope to see a Filipino version of Mexico's Tres Amigos who are currently ruling the cinema world—Alejandro González Iñárritu, Guillermo del Toro and Alfonso Cuarón.

"Amigos and amigas" sounds fine, too. It doesn't even have to be tres or cuatro—the more, the merrier! To the Solitos, Jeturians, Laranases, Yamamotos and other film talents of Philippine cinema, let's make it happen!

WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

The best of the best

By MAURICE ARCACHE
INQUIRER

The best-attended fashion shows in 2006 included Monique Lhuillier's, in which the US-based designer gathered the cream of the crop from Manille and Cebu in an elegant fashion-show-and-dinner affair.

Still the reigning Prince of Alta Moda, Inno Sotto held a fabulous fashion show at the Ayala Triangle. Manille's well-heeled set couldn't get enough of his super 2006 collection.

Master retailer Ben Chan's Bench underwear and jeans show was witnessed by a fully packed house at the colossal Araneta Coliseum.

Metro Magazine's four-week Metro Wear fashion series featured hotshot couturiers, new designers, and Cesar Gaupo's shoes at the Rockwell Tent.

Monique Lhuillier and husband Tom Bugbee

Best cell phones

It was neck and neck year between Nokia and Motorola. Nokia held the super launching of its N93 at Ayala Museum.

Motorola held its yearly bash at the eye-catching Nami beach resort in Boracay. Its latest Motokrzr cell phones were given to lucky invitees.

Nokia's Black party at Cuisine and Embassy saw tons of guests dressed in black, natch, and receiving Nokia's newest N Series cell phones.

Motorola also launched its Motokrzr at the Rockwell Tent where some 100 lucky invitees out of 200 received the latest eye-catching cell phones.

Without batting an eyelash, I would say the best drink of the year is the bubbly champagne. Champagne "puts a twinkle in your eye and a song in your heart. Life looks better with bubbles," dahlings.

In this connection, Vevue Clicquot and Moet & Chandon are the favorite champagnes of the year.

KLM gave the best airline bash, the best show, the best cocktail finger food, the best giveaways (20 awesome business-class tickets to Amsterdam and other points of Europe) during its 55th anniversary at the Conservatory of the Peninsula Manila.

The best flip-flops are none other than the internationally renowned Havaianas. The product from Brazil took the jet-set by storm.

Also to be noted is the new entry, Crocs. They're so comfy and come in different shapes and colors.

For the best new restaurants, definitely one of them would be Thai Silk in Serendra. It had our town's true gourmands queuing just to get a table. Brilliant Cecille Chang Ysmael is doing wonders in her resto after several years of training in Thailand.

The excellent Balducci Restaurante, also in Serendra, sweeps one away to beautiful Tuscany. It has an Italian bistro atmosphere and the delectable aroma of the best of Tuscany's dishes. One would definitely go back to savor the delicious choices in the menu.

Steak House was another new resto in Serendra that caused tidal waves with its excellent menu such as its superb Tagalog Beef Steak and Lapu-lapu. The choices of steaks are unbelievable, but at the top of the list would be the steak with foie gras and steak with escargot.

The phenomenal Nanohana Japanese Restaurant at 130 Valero St., Salcedo Village, had Cosmo Manille going gaga over the excellent, superb dishes flown in direct from Japan, and prepared by great Japanese chefs. One had to make reservations in advance to get in. It was always a full-house affair, dahlings.

Best bars, restos

Nuvo, at Greenbelt 2, was still the numero uno bar in the city. At its helm was the King of the Night Life, Louie Ysmael, still the major reason for Nuvo's staying power.

Bobong Velez got Mezze, also at Greenbelt 2, on a roll with a fantastic opening. It offered the original recipes of the defunct Doña Nena Resto, owned by his grandmother. The resto was known for the after-dinner sounds played by guest DJs.

Mezze, this chic resto/bar, packed them like sardines. The excellent menu, superbly prepared by chef Fernando Aracama, would have our town's gourmands going back for more. Apres dinner, there would be party music and terrific DJ sounds. Guests would rub elbows with the beautiful faces of The Fort.

Capone at Fraiser Place, Valero St., Salcedo Village, was the favorite late-hour place by night owls. With main man Jay Server, the place would still be full of energy and life even way past Cinderella's bedtime.

Among dance clubs, Embassy was the royalty of them all, dahlings. You could dance with the crowd on the dance floor. Or you might prefer the VIP room, for more shoulder room. Meanwhile, at the Prive room, you could sit and chat while listening to dance tunes.

One could find Pier One in Boracay and The Fort. Last year, it opened at Pasong Tamo Extension, Makati. Great food, great sounds and great place to dance.

The fabulous Restaurant & Bar row at Serendra was the place to see and be seen in. It has since become the favorite of the lunch and dinner bunch.

Best personalities

Taipan John Gokongwei set a beautiful example to so-called philanthropists who have never put their money where their self-promoting mouth is by not only donating to schools, but also giving away P10.25 billion of his personal holdings in his famille's conglomerate to educational charities.

Old-wealth socialite Mely Concepcion was the numero uno hostess of Cosmo Manille, entertaining endlessly visiting dignitaries from all over the world.

Another hostess with the mostest was Mellie Romero Ablaza, who organized grandiose balls and entertained the diplomatic corps.

Another top personality was Meldy Cojuangco, who was a dedicated charity fundraiser and patroness of the arts.

Top bag designers were Tina Ocampo and Bea Valdez, who conquered the international fashion scene with their collection of gorgeous evening hand bags that were featured in Vogue. Bea's jewelry were also featured in the mag.

Best sportsman was international billiards king Efren "Bata" Reyes.

And finally, the best slap of the year was the one given by Vina Morales to the rubber mouth of you know who.

Troubled Kris Aquino rushed to hospital

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
INQUIRER

Television host Kris Aquino was rushed to the Makati Medical Center on Wednesday night, after undergoing "severe contractions."

This was confirmed to the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* by Aquino's friends—manager Deo Endrinal and "The Buzz" co-host Boy Abunda.

"After taping [the lunchtime game show] 'Game KNB,' Kris experienced stomach pains around 9 to 10 p.m. [Wednesday night].

From the studio, she went straight to the hospital. She's now under observation," Endinal recounted in a phone interview Thursday afternoon.

Abunda also told the Inquirer that Aquino was resting in a hospital: "This time, it's work-related."

Exactly a week ago, Kris was taken to the same hospital due to "false labor," caused by the stress and tension resulting from the raging controversy involving her husband, basketball player James Yap and Hope Centeno, a beauty clinic receptionist who claimed she had a 10-month illicit affair with Yap.

Kris Aquino and James Yap

After the first emergency, the doctors recommended at least three days' rest. Upon checking out of the hospital, though, Aquino and Yap had to tape an exclusive interview with Korina Sanchez, that according to one source lasted until the wee hours of Sunday morning.

On Tuesday, she attended a press conference for a cooking product, where she unleashed a mouthful on the scandal—berating Centeno and insinuating that she was planning to move from their conjugal home in Makati back to the home of her mother, former president Corazon Aquino, in Quezon City.

Hope Centero

"She's very hardworking," Abunda told the Inquirer in a phone interview on Tuesday night. "These days, however, her mood swings are very wild. Sometimes she's laughing. Other times, she's crying in one corner. It must be because of the difficult pregnancy and the intrigues."

According to Endrinal, the doctors ordered "at least one week's rest. But this could still change, stretching from one week to one month, depending on the doctors' findings and how she responds to medication."

He added that "mom Cory is now watching over Kris at the hospital. James was also with her last night. If I am not mistaken, from an event for his basketball team [Purefoods Chunkee Giants], he went to the hospital."

Endrinal said that he was not certain whether Joshua, Aquino's son by actor Phillip Salvador, had visited the hospital. "They might not want him to be there."

Endrinal, who is also the Business Unit Head of ABS-CBN, told the Inquirer that the network was looking for another host, "to act as temporary replacement for Kris on 'Game KNB?'"

"Definitely, she can't appear on 'The Buzz' this Sunday. She has taped for 'Game' only until Monday next week. We need to find the right person who can pinch-hit for her until the doctors give the go-ahead signal," said Endrinal.

Vicki Belo, Centeno's former employer, told the Inquirer that while everyone seemed "obsessed with the latest rumor, few have shown concern for Kris' unborn child."

"As a doctor, I know that the stress that a mother undergoes is passed on to the baby. That's why I was so upset with my former employee who had pushed Hope to come out with her false claims on national television," Belo told the Inquirer in a phone interview on Wednesday night.

Belo insisted that this former employee was using Hope, to "destroy me… and that Hope, Kris and James are just unwitting victims in this conspirator's personal vendetta against me. I pity Hope most of all because she is totally ruined because of this controversy."

Kris & James show

By JOSE JAVIER REYES
INQUIRER

The irony was that, on the 21st anniversary of the 1986 People Power Revolution, the attention of the public was not on the lackluster celebration at the Edsa Shrine. Rather, all eyes and ears were focused on what was deemed a much bigger event. This was the unfolding of yet another chapter in the telenovela life of Ninoy Aquino's youngest daughter.

Kris Aquino sprang to the blinding spotlight of Philippine media like Pallas Athena. Borne in full-gear on her father's martyrdom and the tidal wave of her widowed mother's popularity, Kris was the perfect warrior child born for the telecommunication. Thus, 21 years ago she was introduced as a sweet and fragile porcelain doll hiding behind spectacles, sniffling beside her sisters, victim of a regime reaching its cathartic end. Before the very eyes of millions of adoring Filipinos, she blossomed into this intelligent, eloquent and fearless daredevil personality who represented feisty youth, with just the right mixture of rebellion and etiquette.

And from the time she had a taste of the limelight, Filipinos could never have enough of Kris—and she could never have enough of us.

When President Cory's daughter entered the entertainment business, she became the personification of the welding of two powerful institutions—politics and show business. In a culture that often gives greater importance to celebrity rather than significance, a very thin line divided well-founded admiration and amusement at someone's ability to feed curiosities and fantasies. Never has it been enough for audiences to be in awe of what their idols have done, are doing, and can do. Apparently more important is how these idols amaze them, if incorrigibly, with accounts of misdemeanors.

In this age of instant gratification, sustained interest and continued success is achieved only if a media personality has the talent to constantly reinvent and consistently disturb and disrupt. Our popular culture is sadly founded on muck and scandal instead of achievement, and obsessed with vulgar intrusion in the guise of searching for truth.

Every other person with access to print and television wants to be a celebrity; nowadays this has become really easy. Reality TV has the power to pluck some lucky creature from utter obscurity and turn him or her into an overnight sensation. And what is reality TV but a protracted and even sadistic view of weaknesses, vulnerabilities and, of course, the sheer guts to do anything and risk everything for fame.

Because of reality TV, audiences has found it more and more difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.

A celebrity's agenda has ceased to be just about award-winning moments in a chosen field of artistry. It has come to include giving the public access to his or her private life. Nowadays, a great part of the celebrity's charm is the ability not to exhibit a persona that is sure to leave a distinct imprint in the minds of fans and detractors alike. A celebrity can afford to be ordinary in talent, but not in personality.

Scandals guarantee media mileage, prolong audience curiosity, and even break—or make—careers. It is not surprising for personalities who have done absolutely nothing worthy of commendation in their craft to become "newsworthy." The less-than-saintly are definitely more interesting to talk about in coffee shops, beauty parlors, parties, and in chat rooms on the Internet. Who got pregnant by whom, who is canoodling with what, who is gay or macho, who beat the living daylights out of whatever… keep the public guessing, moralizing, alive.

Whether spontaneously created by the inherently and professionally malicious, or engineered to suit the needs of competing media institutions, such plots whet the appetite of the scandal-addicted population. What has emerged from this is a culture of media voyeurism that encourages shallow judgmental thinking: It is extremely easy to empathize with perceived victims and condemn perceived evil.

It is not even an exercise in moral discretion, but a virtual exhibition of amorality because celebrities cease to be treated as humans but rather as commodities meant to be snapped up, dissected and eventually discarded. Fans rally behind their idols because it gives them a sense of purpose and moral affirmation. Others twitter, laugh and poohpooh what they dub as cheapness and vulgarity, although they wouldn't pass up on the chance to hear every sordid detail.

The most recent episode in Kris Aquino's life is authentic telenovela material. Seven months pregnant, the wife learns of the alleged infidelity of her once romantic hero husband—he who was meant to be a turning point in her life.

There is nothing new here; stories such as these abound, from the well-protected enclaves of the rich down to the claustrophobic side streets populated by the poorest of the poor.

What's gripping the whole country's interest is the ultra-popular cast of characters. After all, two of the three main protagonists have chosen to live their lives under the magnifying glass of public scrutiny.

Whether or not there is a moral lesson to be learned from the situation, or whether it affirms the law of karma, is beside the point. Public interest tends to trivialize even genuine heartbreak and shatter the integrity of even the innocent.

As both print and broadcast media try to help reconstruct what transpired inside one cubicle in a dermatological clinic; as televiewers watch a weepy lady apologize and invoke the name of love to justify her actions; as they squirm while the sweaty husband is berated by his wife for the mischief… every image and sound byte is lapped up, as in the latest hit soap.

It is on these occasions that the high and mighty are beloved for their fall. These occasions make the common man feel that the rich, powerful and famous are not exempt from the mishaps and embarrassments that make the ordinary and anonymous seem utterly useless.

And this is where the true amorality lies: There are no more heroes and antagonists, only a love-hate relationship between the revered and the admirers. A celebrity willingly permits audiences to pilfer parts of every nook and cranny of their personal lives. It is part of a package deal. Reason and feeling are sacrificed for a stab at the truth/entertainment.

Former Eraserheads member Buddy Zabala, Marcus Adoro and Raymund Marasigan with a fan at the book launch of "Tikman Ang Langit: An Anthology on the Eraserheads."

E-heads book sets mini-reunion for former band mates

By ALEXANDER VILLAFANIA
INQUIRER.NET

Five years since the original Eraserheads split up, three of the members have again met for a little gathering that culminated in the launch of the very first book about the legendary band.

Buddy Zabala, Marcus Adoro and Raymund Marasigan were present at the Powerbooks Greenbelt 3 to support "Tikman ang Langit," the book that is considered as the first published material about any Filipino band in the Philippines.

For the 50 or so people present during the launch, they were treated to almost an hour of Eraserheads rendition by Lei Bautista of the band Prettier than Pink. But the ultimate moment during launch was when Zabala, Adoro and Marasigan, along with members of the band Cambio, played "Magasin." It was the first time that all three played together after a four-year hiatus.

Ostensibly, only Ely Buendia was absent. The lead guitarist and front man of the original Filipino Fab Four could not make it.

"Tikman ang Langit" chronicles the lives of 14 Eraserheads fans as they grew up with the band's music. Most were devotees, others were mere observers of the group's claim to stardom, but a few have experienced brushing shoulders with Eraserheads.

Book authors Melvin Calimag and Jing Garcia, both IT reporters for different daily newspapers, said they only wanted to write a book from fans' perspectives and not just to make a splash in the music scene.

Calimag, who has never written an entire book in his life, said "Tikman ang Langi" would only be a one-time, big-time project, even if it would become a commercial success.

But Garcia has much closer ties with all members of the band and he completed the circle that Calimag created. "He had the passion and I had the connections so we worked on it."

OPINYON

History from a Filipino viewpoint

On the evening of Feb. 4, 1899, in a dark part of what is now Santa Mesa, Manila, a group of American soldiers manning a checkpoint challenged Filipino soldiers coming their way with the order: "Halt!" The Filipinos did not stop and replied: "Alto!"

Nervous, the Americans shouted the warning a second time, "Halt!" and got the same reply twice, "Alto! Alto!"

Given this provocation and following standard procedure, the American soldier fired. It was not a warning shot. A Filipino fell and became the first statistic of what we now remember as the Philippine-American War.

When learned about this historical event in school, it never crossed my mind to make life difficult for my teachers by asking why we knew the name and rank of Private Willie Grayson, who fired the first shot that triggered the Philippine-American War but not the name of the Filipino who was the first casualty of this long and costly war. Is this order of things the result of our having a history written by the victors, in this case the Americans? Should our history a century since continue along the same American story line?

When do we view history from a Filipino viewpoint? While we cannot turn back the hands of time, we can at least revisit the events of that day and ask whether the Filipino who was shot understood the order to halt. For all we know, he mistook it as a greeting and when he shouted back "Alto!" he probably did so with a smile and a wave of his hand.

I was in University of the Philippines, Baguio, recently to participate in a forum organized by the Philippine Historical Association, under its energetic president, Dr. Celestina Boncan, to revisit the early generals of the Philippine Revolution and the Philippine-American War. I was half-hoping that the audience would include cadets of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), to supplement their military history.

Looking Back
By AMBETH OCAMPO
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Some PMA alumni told me they were taught about Western wars, both ancient and modern, but not much about wars fought in our backyard. Do PMA cadets know the battle plans of Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo as well as they know those of Julius Caesar, Hannibal or Douglas MacArthur?

Textbook Philippine history tell us the outcome of major battles, but it rarely goes into the details to let a student know how these were fought, if only to emphasize the valor and fortitude of our heroes. Then, of course, Filipino schoolchildren don't learn much about heroines. Five historians covered five generals in one day: Gregorio del Pilar by Dr. Ricardo T. Jose, Antonio Luna by Dr. Estrellita Muhi, Vicente Lukban by Dr. Reynaldo Imperial, Macario Sakay by Dr. Boncan and Luciano San Miguel by Dr. Cesar Pobre. We hope that the seminar can be brought to other places or the papers published so that we can begin to learn more about the battles that made the Philippines, rightly or wrongly, what it is today.

This seminar has made me realize that February has so many historical events overshadowed by Valentine's Day and, this year, by the Chinese New Year and Ash Wednesday. We have: the start of the Philippine-American War in 1899, the Battle for Manila in 1945 and the Edsa Revolution of 1986. What about the execution of Gomburza in 1872 or the completion of the "Noli Me Tangere" in 1887? So many things to remember, so little time and attention span.

I was reminded that for a long time the Filipino armed resistance to American rule in the early 20th century was described as an insurrection. As a matter of fact, the first stop for any research on the period is a collection of documents compiled, transcribed and translated from the original languages and annotated by an American, Capt. J.R.M. Taylor. This five-volume set was suppressed immediately after it was completed and saw print only in 1971 when Renato Constantino, curator of the Lopez Museum, suggested it as the first publication of the Eugenio Lopez Foundation. These thick volumes are bound in blue with gold letters that spell out the title "The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States."

Taylor had worked on a selection of documents from a large archive known to researchers as the "P.I.R." (for "Philippine Insurgent Records"). An insurrection, which is defined as "rising in open resistance to established authority; a rebellion," is different from a war, which is an armed conflict between nations. Thus, if we follow the Philippine version of history, we note that the Filipinos declared their independence from Spain on June 12, 1898 and established a Republic in Malolos in 1899, complete with a Congress and a Constitution. We were, at least in form, a free and independent nation, so that when the first shot was fired in Manila on Feb. 4, 1899, we did not merely launch an insurrection against the United States, but rather the United States was at war with the short-lived First Philippine Republic.

The "P.I.R." preserved in our National Library is now known as the Philippine Revolutionary Records (P.R.R.). In 1998, the US Library of Congress changed its subject classification from "Philippine Insurrection" to "Philippine-American War." These seemingly small changes are not meant to reopen old wounds but rather to attain and develop perspective, dignity and nationalism from our history.

First Boor

Unbecoming of a gentleman best describes the behavior last Monday of First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo when he challenged to a fight a defense lawyer who was cross-examining him during the trial of one of the several libel cases he has filed against the media. The conduct shows arrogance and a searing contempt for judicial processes. The fact that Arroyo is a lawyer himself may indicate a certain scorn for the ideals he has sworn to uphold as a member of the bar. Does the same scorn characterize his merry litigation against the media and his penchant for filing libel cases against members of the press who cast a critical eye on his conduct as a public figure?

The First Gentleman had the good grace to apologize later to the judge for the unseemly conduct, and he should be credited for that. But his outburst had given the public a glimpse of his personality: Here's one person who would erupt first, and say sorry later. Here's one man who's quick to anger, and slow to appeasement. Here's one person who does not mind at all being a public figure, but who can't stand the glare of the public eye, much less questions about his conduct as a public figure.

The First Gentleman, of course, insists that he's a private person, that he's not a public official. But he himself has not denied the honorific given him as a result of being spouse to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Of course, what may be immediately apparent with the First Gentleman's court conduct is that it seems apposite to his spouse's outbursts, her propensity to bang the phone at the slightest hint of bad news and to walk out of press conferences when she does not like the questions being thrown at her. If only for their vile temper, the two are really compatible. They deserve each other.

The two likewise seem to share a contempt for the press. Cast under the merciless glare of the public eye, Ms Arroyo smarts and hurts. She has been made to account for questions about the legitimacy of her presidency—questions that have arisen not because of the media's doing. She has also been taken to task for her rather slow response to the killings of political dissidents and activists, and seems to share the arrogance of her own officials, such as Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon and Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez, in heaping scorn on the inquiry conducted by the United Nations rapporteur on human rights, Philip Alston, an inquiry which her own government had asked for. And even on her favorite topic of economics, where she supposedly excels and for which she is quick to trumpet the achievements of her management team, she seems to be always on the defensive.

The thing is, the President could answer all of these questions with grace and intelligence, but she always chooses to question the motivations of those posing them, always espying dark shadows behind the queries, and always demanding that the questions be made along her own line of inquiry, which is predictably favorable to her government. She does not only want to be President, she also wants to be stage manager.

Ms Arroyo is accused of having stage-managed the 2004 elections, but Chair Benjamin Abalos of the Commission on Elections does not only insist on denying it, he does not want any questions, either, about the way the Comelec seems to have done its job poorly in safeguarding the sanctity of the ballot. Of course, Abalos could deny the charge, but he cannot refuse to answer queries about them, even those posed by Kontra Daya, an organization against election fraud. Abalos was reportedly irked by the Kontra Daya campaign, but he should look beyond himself. To be sure, Kontra Daya is a citizens' campaign for authentic elections, which the Commission on Elections is duty-bound to ensure.

So are official outbursts a platform and policy of the government? We don't know. What we have observed is that the legendary presidential temper seems to operate by osmosis—from the President's spouse and kin to the President's fellow workers in government. What we're seeing is a new public administration system: a management by flare-ups, a presidency by eruption.

[Inquirer editorial published on March 2, 2007].

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why are so few people outraged by extrajudicial killings?

I am so relieved that the Melo Commission report and UN special rapporteur Philip Alston have condemned the killing of activists and journalists in the Philippines.

But one thing still bothers me. I don't know why there are not more people who are outraged about the killings. It seems as though it took foreign pressure for the administration to respond to these killings. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, the College Editors Guild and the Makati Business Club were among the few organizations that have raised their voices to denounce the killings, but many civil society groups have, strangely, kept their silence. Why?

What bothers me most about the murders is that they are also killing democracy. How? A young, idealistic activist might see that democracy doesn't work when people who legally promote justice get assassinated. This leaves them with few options -- and chilling ones: submit to the oppression in silence; or reject democracy altogether and go to the mountains and join the New People's Army. Either way, some elements in the military are killing what we hold precious—democracy.

In these murders, there is a lesson from Nazi Germany. A German Protestant minister, denouncing the sin of indifference, came up with this story: At first the police came and arrested the Jews, and I said nothing because I had no Jews in my congregation. Then the police came for the communists, and I said nothing, because I had no communists in my congregation. Then they came for the trade unionists, and since I had no trade unionists in my congregation, I said nothing. Then they came for the Catholic priests, and I said nothing, because obviously there were no Catholics in my congregation. Then they came for me, and no one spoke up against my arrest, because there was no one left to protest.

The killings might just go on. When will leftists living in Manila get shot? Then when will the military men train their guns on opposition "destabilizers"? Who will be the next target? The killings won't stop until people start to complain.

People should stop seeing the killings as a minor problem that endangers only the lives of journalists and leftists. And the President should replace the Cabinet officials who keep denying that there is a problem. She needs to restore democracy.

Jonathan Foe
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Sampaloc, Manila

A story common to women

For the second time, and for similar reasons, TV host Kris Aquino is in the headlines. And once again, she, her partner and another girl are the subject of idle talk and gossip nationwide. The Partido ng Manggagawa [Workers' Party] would like to take part in this "talk of the town" but in a different context -- to provide a women's perspective on the issue.

The Kris Aquino story is the story of countless women—rich and poor. To most of the Filipino people in Philippine society, men's philandering is not only acceptable but a measure of manhood—"more women, more macho"—but when it comes to women, having been into more than one relationship not only is immoral but is tantamount to acting like a whore. This reflects the inequality between men and women in our society; there is a double standard on the issue of morality.

Confronted with a situation similar to what Kris is in right now—pregnant, with a philandering husband—women usually have second thoughts about ending a relationship. There lies the difference between rich and poor women. To rich and famous women like Kris, having a child without a father is a no-no, especially, in a super-religious family. To poor and desperate women like Hope—regardless of whether she is telling the truth or not—the considerations are totally different: how to feed, clothe, shelter and educate their children is a greater concern more than the right to be happy and free from abuse and prejudice.

Inasmuch as this is the campaign period, the Partido ng Manggagawa insists that candidates speak of platforms; but the love triangle between Hope, Kris and James is not just show-biz news. There are many Filipinas like Hope, women with a bleak future because they are single parents with no jobs. Society must come to their aid since their predicament is not entirely of their own making.

The Partido ng Manggagawa campaigns not just for workers' demands but also for women's issues, as shown by our support for Nicole in her fight for justice. Among these demands are three months of paid maternity leave for women workers, and protection against sexual harassment and against gender discrimination in the hiring and promotion of women.

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Partido ng Manggagawa
5 Matiyaga St., Barangay Central,
Quezon City

SAMU'T SARI

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

A man spreads the US flag during the Human Dignity Act Movement and Dekada welcome rally for former Office of Insular Affairs director Allen Stayman and fellow staffer Josh Johnson at American Memorial Park Sunday afternoon.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

Filipino members of the the Dekada movement welcome visiting congressional staff and former Office of Insular Affairs director Allen Stayman.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

Parsely Linago, 6, hides behind the US flag during the welcome rally for former Office of Insular Affairs director Allen Stayman and fellow staffer Josh Johnson.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

Filipino Dekada members show off their banner to welcome former Office of Insular Affairs director Allen Stayman.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

A group of friends show their support as they attend the welcome rally at American Memorial Park Sunday afternoon.

JACQUELINE HERNANDEZ

Hundreds of Filipinos together with other nationalities attended the welcome rally for former Office of Insular Affairs director Allen Stayman and fellow staffer Josh Johnson at American Memorial Park. The group is composed of long-staying nonresident workers wanting an improved immigration status in the CNMI.

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Attorney General Matthew T. Gregory, second from right, poses with Masons' newly installed junior warden Isagani I. Benoza and his family and friends during the recent installation of officers for Masonic Year 2007-2008 at Saipan World Resort's Royal Taga. Photo from left are Carmela Benoza, Aida Benoza, Grace Velasco, Liezl Artango, AG Gregory, and Isagani Benoza.

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Members and officers of the Emon Lodge No. 179 Free and Accepted Masons under the Jurisdiction of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Philippines gather for a group photo with Philippine Consul General Wilfredo DL. Maximo and Attorney General Matthew T. Gregory during the recent installation of the officers for the Masonic Year 2007-2008 held at Saipan World Hotel's Royal Taga.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Search for Mr. Island Hunk winner Elmer Hernandez, second right, and 1st Runner-Up winner Dexter Tenorio, second left, pose with friends and supporters Joanne and Sunshine of Trends Beauty Parlor and Cecille Camama during a recent contest at GIG Discotheque. Hernandez was also adjudged Mr. Swimsuit, Mr. Jeans Wear, and Mr. Physique. Tenorio also won the Mr. Casual Wear and Mr. Popularity categories.

Maharlika
PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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